

things we can do to power our world, and I absolutely urge us to do it.

I just want to wrap up by saying, too, that, when we think about what we are going to use our tax dollars to subsidize, we are subsidizing the fossil fuel industry. BERNIE SANDERS and I worked on a bill called the End Polluter Welfare Act. We have documented up to about \$110 billion worth of subsidies to the oil and gas industry, which is six times the subsidy that goes to renewable energy sources—solar, wind. It is high time we started investing in the wind and in the Sun and in the wave technology and in other forms of technology that can help us power our world that don't have these ugly, costly, expensive externalities.

I would ask the gentleman to excuse me now, but thank you for hosting this very important Special Order on raising questions around fracking.

Mr. POCAN. Again, thank you, Representative ELLISON, for all of the work you do with the Progressive Caucus.

This was a Special Order hour tonight to talk about why we need to have safer practices around hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, in this country. For the 15.3 million people who live within a mile of the wells, for everyone who has to eventually suffer the effects of the environment and the health pollutants that are put out by this, there are bills that are introduced in this body that can make sure that we regulate this better, that can make sure they are not exempt from clean air and clean water protections, and that dis-close the toxins that are used so that we can make sure that this process is safer, healthier, and better for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to add as a reminder to everyone, which is also important, that March 31 is the deadline for signing up for the Affordable Care Act. There are extensions. If you have tried to do it and if you can't get it done, there is a little bit of an extension at this time, but you need to do it by March 31. I think we have got some of my colleagues who are going to be talking about that in just a little bit, but I would like to encourage everyone to take advantage of that while they have time in the remaining week.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MASSIE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CASTRO) for 30 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Mr. Speaker, today, we are here to talk about the Affordable Care Act, about some of its milestones and the benefits to the people of the United States, also about some of the critiques that have come up over the last few years and in the last few months.

The Affordable Care Act has succeeded in doing a few things. The United States, for a long time, has been the wealthiest nation on Earth; however, millions and millions of Americans, despite our country's wealth, have been unable to get health care insurance. Many folks have suffered a very long time, either themselves or their family members, in not being able to see a doctor when they have needed to and in being kicked off of insurance because they have hit lifetime caps. College students have gone without insurance for years because they could no longer stay on their parents' plans.

There was, I know, a discussion earlier on the floor—I think during the lunch hour—and there was a question raised by one of the Republican Members. Essentially, his question was: What has the Affordable Care Act done?

□ 1800

Well, there are several concrete things that it has done for the United States. The first is that 3 million students have been able to stay on their parents' insurance plans, where they otherwise would have been kicked off before. The average age where students were kicked off before was about 19. Under the Affordable Care Act, millions of college students can now stay on until the age of 26.

We know this number—5 million people, so far, and growing—have signed up for health care through the exchanges. Five million people. That is very significant. That number continues to grow, as some of the busiest days for the health care Web site and for the call-in number have been over the last few weeks.

Also, 4.4 million Americans have signed up for health care through Medicaid. They have been covered through Medicaid expansion.

We can talk about the fact that some States have decided not to expand Medicaid. So millions of these people, including in my home State of Texas, low-income Americans, most of these people going to work every day, working hard to support themselves and their family members who are still low-income Americans, but because the State governments have not expanded Medicaid in many States, they have not been able to get covered. So we are going to talk about that.

Another issue I want to talk a little bit about is something that is very significant for millions and millions of Americans, and that is mental health parity with physical health.

For years, we tried in State legislatures—I know I tried in Texas, as well

as people across the United States—to make sure that mental health issues are covered by insurance in the same way that you would cover a broken arm or broken leg or even cancer. Millions of Americans suffer from anxiety, depression, and a slew of mental health issues. Previously, they were unable to get covered.

So those are some of the issues that we are going to talk about this evening.

I now yield to my good friend Congressman, GENE GREEN from Texas.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. First of all, I thank my colleague from San Antonio. We are both Texans, and we know the problems. You served a lot of years in the State legislature. I did, too. Frankly, I think a lot of our problems could have been dealt with if Texas would have expanded Medicaid. We are actually giving back money to the Federal Government and not covering children and families in our community because of that.

Frankly, even with the problems with the rollout of the Affordable Care Act, I know some States have done a great job, like Kentucky and California. Some States haven't. But I would think that if Texas did their own exchange, we could be the ones making those decisions. I think particularly with the Medicaid expansion.

I appreciate you asking for the Special Order tonight because we are coming down up to the deadline of March 31. In fact, I have to do a commercial first.

A lot of us have done these events on how people can sign up for the Affordable Care Act. I have one that we are sponsoring this Saturday at the Harris County Department of Education building. It is at 6300 Irvington Boulevard in our district. I am partnering with some of your former colleagues: State Representative Armando Walle; State Representative Jessica Farrar; our relatively new State senator, Sylvia Garcia; and our city council member, Ed Gonzalez. We are doing that this Saturday from 9 to 1 so people can come in and sign up.

The success, though, is that the Web site was down for 2 months, but we have seen a huge number of people signing up—5 million as of last week. I hear on Monday of this week they had 1 million contacts, both by phone and to the Web site.

So there is a need out there for the Affordable Care Act. It is landmark health care reform.

I was on the subcommittee and the Committee of Energy and Commerce to help draft part of it. We did days and nights of drafting amendments. We had both bipartisan amendments adopted, including one on mental health that Congressman MURPHY from Pennsylvania and I had worked out to expand mental health coverage.

Of course, we live in a bicameral Congress and sometimes the Senate doesn't always do what we would like

to do on the House side. That is the nature of it. But the Affordable Care Act is expanding health care access.

You mentioned some of the successes that we have. I know as a State legislator I would have loved to have a State law that required insurance companies to pay 80 percent of their premiums they received back as benefits. I don't know of any State that does that. I would have loved to have that in Texas.

Somebody who pays an insurance premium, whether it is employer health care or an individual health policy, they can be guaranteed that 80 percent of their premium will come back in benefits. That is what the Federal law is.

We hear our Republican colleagues say they still haven't come up to an alternative to the Affordable Care Act—because they can't.

That is one of the successes in there, and there are a lot of successes. In fact, some of that law is actually Republican ideas that have been built up over the last 20 or 30 years, saying, How can we cover the uninsured in our country?

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. That is right.

Congressman, once upon a time, these were the ideas of the Heritage Foundation. This was a conservative movement, conservative ideas, about how folks would take individual responsibility. Because, as you know, being in Harris County, our large hospitals systems end up with millions of dollars in uncompensated care every year.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Our Harris County Hospital district is our catchment. But not all counties in the State of Texas have that option to have a hospital district.

Even in our area, I have a district that is one of the highest in the country of people who work who don't get insurance through their employer. That is why the Affordable Care Act is important. In our district, we have an estimated 261,000 people who would have the opportunity to get health care through the Affordable Care Act. And we are hoping to sign them up. We started in November, and we have had these workshops literally all over our district, in partnership with lots of different groups.

The Affordable Care Act is particularly important in our districts because we have one of the highest rates in the country of people who are uninsured. It is essential people know that the financial assistance is available under the Affordable Care Act that can lower their health care costs. In fact, nearly 6 of the 10 uninsured people will find that they can find health coverage for \$100 or less a month.

Like I said, this Saturday we are having a forum. This forum is a great opportunity for people to come and actually learn about health care options, because health care insurance is important.

After World War II, our country made a decision. The countries we re-

built in Western Europe had government-run insurance. Canada has government-run insurance. Our country decided to go with employer-based insurance. And that worked well up until about 10 or 12 years ago, where we started seeing employers drop that coverage.

At one time in our country, 80 percent of the people who worked had insurance through their employer. Now it is below 60 percent, and it is getting worse. Although with the Affordable Care Act, we are actually seeing increases. Because even a small business can be eligible for subsidies to cover their employees under the Affordable Care Act.

Like I said, as a member the Energy and Commerce Committee, I am proud of us passing something. It is not perfect, but it is a step in the right direction. I would hope that this Congress and maybe a future Congress can say, Okay, let's see what is wrong with the Affordable Care Act. It is just like we had to go back and fix Medicare on a number of occasions.

Nobody wants to abolish Medicare. It is one of the greatest pieces of legislation that we have ever passed. I would hope that over the years we would not only build on the Affordable Care Act to make people—just like with Medicare—know that they don't have to worry about putting their families in bankruptcy because they have an illness. The Affordable Care Act will help us on the road to protect that.

I appreciate your leadership tonight on this. I know I have a colleague from California from my class who is up next. I thank you for your time.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Thank you, Congressman.

A few things that you pointed out that I think are especially noteworthy. The first is that there is no perfect bill that we pass here. And especially, the larger the bill is, the more you are going to have to come back and change it and tweak it. That is what you have seen with the Affordable Care Act. So there is no surprise that we are going to have to have some changes to it. Quite frankly, there have been some changes in deadlines. There have been some other changes. Americans rightly ask, Well, why is the President or the administration doing that?

Well, it is very simple. Last year, for example, Congress passed the least amount of legislation of any year on record. The President is taking action to improve the law because the Congress will not or cannot. Somebody has got to be doing something here in Washington. Unfortunately, in the House of Representatives, we have hit a standstill. So the administration is making sure and listening to Americans and making the changes that are necessary.

No bill is ever going to be perfect. Social Security was deeply criticized when it was enacted. For several years, Medicare was deeply criticized when it was enacted.

So this is no surprise. Americans in previous generations have seen this before, have lived through this before, and this program has been a successful one. It will be even more successful as we go forward, and we will continue to talk a bit about some of the benefits to millions of Americans.

Before I yield to my colleague from California, LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD, I want to point out that there are a few ways people can get information and sign up. We have been talking a lot about the Web site and asking people to go online, but there is also the traditional method.

We have the online Web site at healthcare.gov, of course. Also, by mail. You can download an application and send it in by mail. You can go in person here. You can also call by phone at 1-800-318-2596. I know there has been a lot of emphasis on the Web site, but you can also enroll by these traditional methods. That means a lot to a lot of folks in different communities.

I was at an enrollment fair on Saturday, and there was a woman who looked to be somewhere between 55 and 60. Quite honestly, she was a bit baffled by having to get on the computer, even though she was being assisted, and she asked, Is there another way I can do it where I don't have to use a computer? The answer to that is yes, there are traditional methods.

With that, I want to yield to Congresswoman ROYBAL-ALLARD from the wonderful city of Los Angeles.

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. I thank the gentleman for yielding and for organizing tonight's Special Order on the Affordable Care Act, which is helping to make health care a reality for millions of Americans across our Nation.

Luckily, California is one of the States that has a plan. It has bought into the Affordable Care Act. As a result, thousands of California are now benefiting from what we in California call Covered California, which is the ACA plan there.

By enrolling in the Affordable Care Act, parents and their children no longer have to endure illnesses or painful injuries because they can't afford a doctor. Parent don't have to worry about their children getting a preventable illness because they can't afford to have them vaccinated or treated for a chronic preventable disease.

Why? Because under the ACA, many immunizations and preventative services are free.

Seniors and adults are also eligible for free preventive services, including annual checkups, annual mammograms, prostate cancer screenings, and immunizations. Young adults, including 435,000 young Californians, don't have to worry about being a burden on their family if they get sick or are in an accident because they can remain on their parents' insurance until age 26, and get affordable insurance after that.

Also critical is the fact that under the Affordable Care Act, no one can be

denied health care coverage because of a preexisting condition.

The ACA is a wonderful opportunity, as you have pointed out, for uninsured Americans to get the health care that they need to improve the quality of life for themselves and for that of their family. And I would like to just give one example of that.

A constituent of mine from the city of Bell by the name of Roberto Rivas is in his mid-twenties. On December 21, 2013, he arrived at 6 a.m. to enroll in a health insurance plan before going to work at KFC, where he is not offered any health insurance. He is also a full-time student at Trade Tech studying chemistry. He would like to use his education to study proteins and to research viruses such as hepatitis and other infectious diseases.

Until the age of 21, along with his 10-year-old sister, he was covered by his mother under Medi-Cal. When he turned 21, he was no longer eligible for Medi-Cal. He lost that insurance and was left completely without any health insurance whatsoever.

Shortly after, he began suffering from breathing problems. He went to a doctor and found out that he had pneumonia. Later, after being treated for that pneumonia, he received a medical bill for \$4,663. He had no insurance to cover that. He even asked for charity care services to help cover his expenses, but was denied that request.

Robert said:

As a minimum wage worker and a full-time student, it is hard to get health insurance.

Thanks to ObamaCare:

Now I can go to school and not stress about getting sick and ending up in the hospital.

I'm calling everybody in my family to tell them I'm enrolled in health care and that they need to come out and get covered, too.

□ 1815

Robert Rivas was also astounded by the service, the friendly faces, and the applause he received when he enrolled; and he says:

To know so many people actually care about me getting health insurance is great.

This is just one example of the millions of Americans who are benefitting from what we call ObamaCare, or the Affordable Care Act.

I am hoping that more Californians who have not applied, and Americans across the country who are uninsured and can benefit greatly by enrolling in health care, that they don't miss out.

There are only 5 days left until the enrollment deadline of March 31. I hope that, today, they will visit healthcare.gov or use any services which you have already outlined to enroll in the Affordable Care Act for themselves and for their families.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Thank you, Congresswoman. And what a powerful story that you have told. I am glad to hear that California has done such an incredible job in making health care available to its constituents and to its residents. Thank you.

I would also point out, Congresswoman ROYBAL-ALLARD mentioned

something that is very significant because Republicans have tried to repeal the Affordable Care Act now—I think it is about 51 times—50, 51 times.

We make no bones about it. There are a lot of Americans—a decent number of Americans who agree with that argument, who say repeal it; but let's understand, if your argument is repeal it, then understand exactly what you are repealing.

First, there is no plan that has been offered by the other side—no alternative. Also, if you repeal it, what you are saying now is you are going to, again, allow insurance companies to kick off cancer patients because they hit a lifetime limit, send them out of the hospital, send them home.

You are not going to allow recent college graduates to stay on their parents' insurance until they are 26 years old.

Remember, health care problems and big hospital bills, for years now, have been the number one reason for personal bankruptcies. People would run out of insurance money.

They would have to take out all of their savings from their bank accounts to pay their hospital bills; and then, they could no longer make their mortgage payment, their car payment. They couldn't help their kids go to college. They essentially became broke.

If you are talking about repealing the Affordable Care Act, then you have to accept and be upfront about the kind of future that you are inviting, which is a travel back to the past.

I have been surprised in my time here that Republicans have tried to repeal this law 51 times, and what is more surprising is that there is no alternative plan to the Affordable Care Act.

That is why, in the surveys, you see over 60 percent of Americans that say: Yeah, I may have an issue with it. I didn't like the way the Web site was done. I disagree with some parts of it, but I don't want it repealed. I want it improved.

Unfortunately, on the other side of the aisle, the strategy has not been to improve this thing and work with us to make it better. Like I said, any big law—any big law—whether it is about health care or mortgages or financial services or anything, any big law is going to require some tweaks and some changes.

So I hope that they will listen to the voice of Americans and take a different tack.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my friend, the gentleman from California (Mr. CÁRDENAS).

Mr. CÁRDENAS. I thank my good friend from San Antonio, Texas.

Congressman CASTRO, you are absolutely right. To go back away from the Affordable Care Act means to go back to the old system, and the old system is not the good old days.

When we are looking at families who are fortunate to even have insurance, their insurance is going up seven to 17 percent, year over year over year. That is unsustainable.

People's income does not go up that high, that fast. People's opportunity to find other ways to find that money somewhere else in their budget doesn't go up that fast, so those were not the good old days. Actually, the best days are yet to come.

What we have seen 52 times here is an opportunity—or a tried opportunity to sabotage the Affordable Care Act, and by calling it by another name doesn't make it bad.

Yes, the rollout could have happened better, but the bottom line is the good days are yet to come. They are here now. The past are not the good old days.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak. I think it is important for us to understand that what we are talking about here is high quality affordable health care, which is something that was denied and out of reach for so many seniors and families in my district in the San Fernando Valley and across the country.

One in three people in my district were uninsured, but Covered California is giving those people the opportunity to purchase affordable plans that will give them the care they need when they get sick and the preventative services they will need to stay healthy.

While the rollout of the Affordable Care Act hasn't been perfect, Covered California has been very successful in providing a simple, straightforward way to enroll.

I feel really bad for those States where their State legislatures and their Republican Representatives have denied them the opportunity to experience good affordable health care. I hope that they can catch up.

Last week, Covered California announced that they had enrolled over 1 million people through the State-run exchange. That is in California alone. Their critical work has helped hundreds of thousands of California families, seniors, small businesses to gain access to high quality affordable health care that was once denied to them for too long.

My staff and I have been working alongside Covered California to help enroll residents in the San Fernando Valley. Over the last few months, I have been hosting a series of successful enrollment workshops for the Affordable Care Act; and as a matter of fact, we will reach 30 events by this week-end.

This is where families learn about the options available to them under the new health care law, including learning about insurance policies that can be purchased through the Covered California health insurance exchange, which has been successful in getting folks enrolled.

More than 500 families have taken advantage of these workshops just in my district alone.

Wow. Can you imagine, Congressman CASTRO, if every single one of the 435 Congressional Members rolled up their sleeves and helped people get enrolled?

That would be millions upon millions of more American families that would be enrolled in affordable health care.

In the last week before the deadline, every Representative should take this opportunity to do the same job that we have been able to do in my district. We must help families sign up for the Affordable Health Care Act.

The day will come very soon when the truth will overcome the lies that have scared so many people. Billions of dollars have been spent scaring people away from trying to even enroll in the Affordable Care Act.

Let me give you an example. I have met with parents who have come to workshops to sign up, and they have anxiety and fear in their eyes; but thank God, just moments later, their fears go away when they find out that they now have affordable, reliable health care.

People with mild asthma that were once denied health care can no longer be discriminated against. They are no longer denied health care, and they can breathe easy knowing that they can now see a doctor, and they can actually get the medicines that they need just to breathe.

I met with a gentleman who was sitting there with his wife and his daughter, the sole income earner for that family. I don't know how he does it, but with \$9 an hour, he manages to feed a family of three; and he was worried that he couldn't afford maybe \$30, \$40, \$50 a month.

When the person turned the computer around and showed him what his eligibility was, he almost came to tears, realizing that, once and for all, himself, his wife, and his teenage daughter can now have health care.

I will tell you what. This is serious business. America, it is time that you sign up for affordable health care. Just try it. Don't worry; be happy.

Sign up for the insurance that you deserve.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Thank you, Congressman CÁRDENAS. Thank you for all of your work.

You also raise a great point, which is folks will often see the sticker price of the insurance on the exchanges.

By the way, I, as well as many other Members of Congress, bought our insurance off of the exchanges. We were getting asked that question a lot. You know, are you going to buy ObamaCare?

The answer is yes. I bought my insurance off the exchanges, and I saved money.

Folks should make sure that they also check, besides the sticker price, what kind of subsidy they get because it is meant to make insurance affordable for middle class Americans and others.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New Mexico (Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM).

Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM of New Mexico. Thank you very much, Congressman JOAQUIN CASTRO.

Muchas gracias, al congresista JOAQUIN CASTRO.

Thank you so much for calling us together to talk about this critically important issue for our families.

Twenty years ago, when I was running the New Mexico Department on Aging, I remember an incredibly tragic call from a family of a 60-year-old woman who had fallen and broken her hip. She was in a hospital in Albuquerque.

Now, of course, hospitals are required to provide stabilizing emergency treatment and even surgery if that is required in that instance; but unfortunately, this 60-year-old woman didn't have insurance, and she was rolled out of the hospital in a wheelchair without the required surgery for her hip fracture.

If the Affordable Care Act was in place when this happened, this 60-year-old woman could have simply provided her health insurance card to someone at the hospital, and the hospital would have stabilized her hip, performed the surgery, and then provided follow-up rehabilitation care. This would allow this woman to walk again.

The required stabilization is critical for successful recovery of that particular hip injury, and the long-term consequences of not receiving the care, in addition to the pain and suffering of this woman, are significant. Quite frankly, she would never have walked again without that surgery.

Now, thankfully, in her case, the whole community came together to gather enough money to pay for her treatment; but if this were to happen today, she could have already purchased subsidized insurance in the health insurance marketplace or qualified for Medicaid, and she would have been able to receive treatment without the scare and the subsequent fundraising by her family in that instance.

People across the country face situations like this every single day. That is why it is critical that we tell our friends and neighbors that they only have 5 days left to enroll in health insurance through the marketplace—5 days. There is absolutely no time to waste.

Like many of my colleagues, I have been working with groups in my district and have been participating in enrollment events to help provide information and to assist New Mexicans to enroll.

Two of my constituents, Mark and Elizabeth Horst from Albuquerque, signed up for bronze plans through the exchange last fall. They make \$24,000 a year between them and have qualified for \$612 in subsidies, which covers the cost of the bronze plan.

Thousands more New Mexicans are still eligible. New Mexico had the third highest uninsured of any State before the Affordable Care Act went into effect this year. In the Hispanic community, more than 25 percent are uninsured, and more than that are underinsured.

Today, more than 360,000 in New Mexico are still eligible for enrollment. By enrolling in a plan, you don't have to risk injury or a lifetime of debt. You can get your family covered; and, by having access to primary care, your family can stay healthier longer.

I appreciate my colleague's effort today. I thank you very much.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Thank you, Congresswoman.

We only have a few minutes left, and I would like to yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DOGGETT).

Mr. DOGGETT. I would just like to thank you for the work that you are doing on this, and I believe our real message is to the many people out there—some of whom may even think that this law has been repealed. They have tried so many times.

As you pointed out a little earlier, this is an opportunity that is there for the next 5 days. Get beyond all the political chatter. Turn to a group like the American Cancer Society or the American Diabetes Association. Look at the information that is there.

Then go to one of the many enrollment fairs we are having across San Antonio this weekend. There is one up in Austin that is going to go almost 24 hours straight. These are opportunities to get out and do this.

I know you had a very successful enrollment fair in San Antonio. I had one over at Progreso Hall. Our colleague, PETE GALLEGOS, had one out at Palo Alto. These have been opportunities for a wide range of our neighbors to come out and participate. We just want to encourage them to do more.

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Thank you, Congressman DOGGETT, and thank you for your work when this bill was being worked on and drafted. Thank you for helping to pass it and, since then, passionately making sure that people get on to the ACA.

Mr. DOGGETT. I think, if we keep working together, we can find ways to strengthen and improve this, but the main thing is for our families to get out there now.

I think, increasingly, most folks are realizing, as you pointed out, with so many efforts to repeal, that the only alternative that they offer is "Nothing Care."

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Ms. DELBENE (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and the balance of the week on account of official business in the district.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

Karen L. Haas, Clerk of the House, reported and found truly enrolled a bill of the House of the following title, which was thereupon signed by the Speaker: